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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 16, 2006

In Today's Papers

Turks Debate Sending Troops to Lebanon

All papers: On Tuesday, Foreign Minister Abdullah Gul briefed President Ahmet Necdet Sezer and CHP leader Deniz Baykal on Turkish plans for dispatching peacekeeping troops to Lebanon. Baykal said the international peacekeeping force would eventually be dragged into clashes with Hezbollah in Lebanon, warning against the danger of getting involved in the Middle East fighting. Gul told Baykal reluctance to take part in the international force for Lebanon would jeopardize Turkish expectations to be given a temporary seat in the UN Security Council for 2009-10, according to Yeni Safak. Cumhuriyet claims there is disagreement between the Turkish government eager to announce participation in the international Lebanon force and the military preferring to wait for a new UN resolution detailing the tasks of the peacekeepers. The paper says the military had been concerned by the commitment of Prime Minister Erdogan for sending troops in a recent phone talk with Lebanese Prime Minister Siniora, and by the statement of Lebanese Embassy officials that Turkey was among the countries to join the UN force.

On Wednesday, Gul, accompanied by officials from the Prime Minister's Office and the Turkish General Staff (TGS,) left for Lebanon to meet PM Siniora and other Lebanese officials. Gul will attend a working luncheon hosted by Siniora which French, Malaysian and Pakistani foreign ministers will also attend. Hurriyet claims the Turkish delegation headed by Gul could hold indirect talks with Hezbollah in Lebanon, whereas Sabah disagrees. Gul's visit to Israel, however, has been postponed until Sunday since Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni is scheduled to visit New York while Gul is in Lebanon. Gul will also meet Prime Minister Olmert and his deputy Peres in Israel. After Israel, Gul is expected to call on Damascus. Gul is also set to participate in reconstruction and humanitarian aid meetings for Lebanon on August 31 and Palestine on September 1, both to be held in Stockholm.

Editorial Commentary on Turkish Troop Dispatch to Lebanon

Zafer Atay writes in the economic/political daily Dunya that a possible attempt by the prospective international peacekeeping force to disarm Hezbollah would be like "playing with fire:" "After 30 days of war, Israel confessed that it couldn't beat Hezbollah. It will be crazy to expect UN soldiers to accomplish a mission that Israel couldn't. Besides, Hezbollah did not agree on a UN peace force but only to a ceasefire. In the past, foreign soldiers in Lebanon had to face violent attacks. As an example, the US lost the biggest number of military lives in a day since the World War II, in 1983, by a suicide attack against its Embassy and Marine headquarters in Beirut. In a suicide attack on the same day, the French headquarters as well lost 60 lives. Therefore, Ankara is following the right policy to wait for a second UN resolution to determine the duties of the peacekeeping force."

Mustafa Karaalioglu of the Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak believes Turkey should help Lebanon: "All the countries willing to send troops to Lebanon, including Turkey, are still hesitant because they are not sure if they can trust Israel. In only one month Israel presented the whole world with a new crisis. Israel also revealed its rather ignorant policies when it bombed the UN office while it was hitting Hezbollah in Lebanon. The paradox lies right here: on one side there is the necessity of helping the people of Lebanon, together with whom we cried for their losses during last month; and on the other side are Israel's tactics and success in involving other countries in its own problems. We need to debate the issue a little more."

Tan Welcomes a US Special Coordinator for the PKK

Turkish Foreign Ministry (MFA) Spokesman Namik Tan told the

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Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak that the anticipated appointment of a US special coordinator for the PKK would speed up the struggle against terrorism. Tan said a retired military official could be named as US coordinator. "The United States is the first country that has declared the PKK a terrorist organization. The US has provided Turkey significant help in the capture of Abdullah Ocalan. Bearing all that in mind, it is not possible that the US will hold meetings with the PKK," Tan emphasized.

Bush to Meet with Erdogan Early October

Hurriyet, Milliyet, Sabah, Yeni Safak: President Bush has responded positively to Prime Minister Erdogan's request for an appointment at the White House, saying he could meet Erdogan on October 5-6. Angela Merkel is expected to visit Turkey accompanied by Turkish businessmen on that day, so Ankara is now trying to put off the German Chancellor's visit to the second half of October. Sabah notes the upcoming Merkel visit was important due to the critical nature of Turkey-EU negotiations, saying Erdogan might have to make a difficult choice between Merkel and Bush.

Government, Labor Unions Negotiate Pay Rises

All papers report that during talks with labor unions which kicked off on Tuesday, the ruling AK Party government told public sector employees it is ready to compensate them for losses incurred due to rising inflation. Public sector labor unions, Kamu-Sen, Memur-Sen, and KESK, demanded at least a 10 percent rise in civil servant salaries, and asked that the current monthly minimum wage of YTL 477 in Turkey be raised to slightly above YTL 1,000. Collective bargaining talks will be completed in two weeks.

TV Highlights

NTV (7 a.m.)

Domestic News

- Opposition CHP leader Deniz Baykal warned the dispatch of peacekeeping troops to Lebanon would cause serious troubles for Turkey.

- Two Turkish civil servants working on a road renovation project in the southeastern province of Bingol were abducted by suspected

PKK terrorists on Tuesday evening.

- Two Turkish soldiers have been killed in fighting with the PKK terrorists in the southeastern border province of Sirnak.

International News

- US State Department has released a statement to note the 22nd anniversary of the beginning of the PKK campaign of terrorist violence against Turkey, calling on the PKK to "cease terrorist actions and lay down arms."

- United Nations is planning to deploy a peacekeeping force of 15,000 to the south of Lebanon, with the first troops of a phased deployment on the ground within 10 days, officials said. Israel has begun pulling its troops out of southern Lebanon.

- The Iraqi police on Tuesday closed down the "Ocalan Institution for Literature and Research" in Baghdad. The office, used for political propaganda, international contacts with the PKK terrorists, and the treatment of injured militants, had opened seven months ago.

- A truck rigged with explosives detonated outside the offices of Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK) in the northern Iraqi city of Mosul, killing nine and wounding another 36.

- The Iranian administration has launched a "Holocaust cartoon exhibit" as a response to cartoons of the Prophet Muhammad published

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last year.

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